



Minnesota State Plan Accountability Addendum Cover Letter

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted our students, educators, families and broader school communities. It is now more critical than ever for the Minnesota to support our schools so that they can best meet the needs of students and families.

In order to address the ever-changing landscape our schools are facing as a result of the pandemic, Minnesota is using the U.S. Department of Education's process to submit a one-time addendum to the accountability section of its state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This addendum will allow us to make temporary changes to our accountability system to reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on accountability data collection and usability. We also stand ready to act on any additional flexibility the U.S. Department of Education might offer with respect to assessment, accountability or school support.

Our North Star accountability system under ESSA uses indicators based on statewide tests of mathematics, reading and English language proficiency, as well as graduation rates and consistent attendance to prioritize schools for two major types of support: comprehensive and targeted. The indicators are arranged into three stages, each of which helps us identify schools with the greatest needs across the greatest number of areas, so that they can be prioritized for the highest levels of support.

Schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement receive intensive, customized support from Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence (RCEs). Schools identified for targeted support and improvement work primarily with their local leadership, although some support for these schools is still available from the RCEs. As a result of the pandemic, we expect the support provided by the centers will need to broaden to include health (physical, mental, social and emotional support for students, families and staff), adapting programs to reflect changes in enrollment and revenue, and a greater focus on student and family engagement. These expansions of support will be in addition to the critical academic improvement work the centers already engage in with districts and schools.

Since this addendum does not offer any flexibility around the administration of statewide tests and is instead focused solely on the accountability system, one key element of our proposal is to change the weighting of data from the years surrounding the pandemic. We expect that data collected during the 2020-21 school year will be less consistent or representative of school-level experiences than data collected during 2018-19. While we hope that the destabilizing effects of the pandemic decrease during the next year and a half, we also expect somewhat greater uncertainty about 2021-22 data than we have about 2018-19 data. As a result, instead of weighting the three years equally when identifying schools for support, we propose to weight 2018-19 data most heavily, followed by 2021-22 data, with the least weight on 2020-21 data. The U.S. Department of Education granted Minnesota a waiver for data from 2019-20, when most data was unavailable.

Our addendum also replaces the consistent attendance indicator for the 2020-21 school year. We know that the shift to distance learning has led to much greater variation between districts in how attendance data is collected, and we do not believe attendance data collected during 2020-21 will be comparable to that collected prior to or after the pandemic. Instead, we propose looking at how many students returned to their school after the summers of 2020 and 2021—in comparison to the average retention rates before the pandemic—to get a sense of how closely connected students and families are staying to their schools.

Finally, our proposal modifies our identification processes to better focus support for high schools. Under Minnesota's current state plan, any high school with a four-year graduation rate below 67% overall or for any student group is identified for comprehensive support, the highest level. As a result, many high schools that focus on credit or dropout recovery, for whom the four-year rate is not a particularly useful measurement of success, have been identified. Additionally, many schools with a single student group below the 67% graduation rate have been identified for this highest level of support.

Given the increased support we expect the RCEs will provide to each identified school and that high schools already make up a disproportionate share of schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement, this identification of high schools needs to become more strategic. We propose three major changes. First, for schools focused on credit and dropout recovery, we will use the seven-year graduation rate instead of the four-year rate to create an initial group of schools that could be identified, then use additional criteria to narrow that pool to the schools that most need support. Second, because traditional schools may have felt pressure to transfer students to credit and dropout recovery schools, we will consider a linked identification of the traditional schools from which credit and dropout recovery schools with low seven-year graduation rates receive the most students. Third, looking at all high schools, those where the graduation rate for all students is above 67% but the rate for one or more student groups is below 67% will be identified for targeted support rather than comprehensive support. This combination of changes should enable the Regional Centers of Excellence to work with a more tightly focused group of schools most likely to benefit from their expanded support.

Minnesota's one-time addendum proposal is available for public comment Tuesday, February 2, 2021, through Wednesday, February 10, 2021. [Read the full addendum](#). Comments can be submitted via email to mde.essa@state.mn.us.